1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

174 177 411 during prometal times; but an intimation from Mashém that the old men thought it much better to take the turtle with the teeth of an "animal that goes in the water", and the similarity in terms for "harpoon" (or arrow) and "teeth" both suggest that the aboriginal point may have been a sea-lion tooth, and that the foreshaft itself may have been a larger tooth of seal or cetacean. While the modern harpoon is shaped with the aid of metal (hoop-iron, etc.), the forms are quite evidently vestigial of knifeless manufacture, in which a naturally rounded or abraded or fire-shaped foreshaft was fitted into the natural socket afforded by a cane-stalk broken at its weakest point—i.e., just below the joint; and both function and socket arrangement (as well as the linguistic evidence) strongly suggest the cylindrical tooth as the germ of the apparatus.

223 It is probable that water-fowl, considered collectively, stand second in importance as Seri prey; and the foremost fowl is undoubtedly the pelican, which serves not only as a fruitful food-supply but as the chief source of apparel.

The principal haunt and only known breeding ground of the pelican in the Gulf of California is Isla Tassne, an integral part of Seriland; and while the great birds are doubtless taken occasionally in Bahia Kunkaak, El Infiernillo, Bahia Tepoka, and other Seri waters, this island is the principal pelican hunting ground. According to Mashém's account, the chase of the pelican here is a well organized collective process: at certain seasons, or at least at times deemed propitious by the shamans, pelican harvests are planned; and after some days of preparation a large party assemble at a certain convenient point (presumably Punta Antigualla) and await a still evening in the dark of the moon. When all conditions are favorable they set out for the island at late twilight, in order that it may be reached after dark; on approaching the shore the balsas are left in charge of the women, while the warriors and the larger boys, armed only with clubs, rush on the roosting fowls and slaughter them in great numbers—the favorite coup de grâce being a blow on the neck. The butchery is followed by a gluttonous feast, in which the half-famished families gorge the tenderer parts in the darkness, and noisily carouse in the carnage until overcome by slumber. Next day the matrons select the carcasses of least injured plumage and carefully remove the skins, the requisite incisions being made either with the edge of a shell-cup or with a sharp sliver of cane-stalk taken from an injured arrow or a broken balsa-cane. The feast holds for several days, or until the last bones are picked and the whole party sated, when the clans scatter at will, laden with skins and lethargic from the fortnight's food with which each maw is crammed.

[237] [281]

Mashém's recital gave no indication as to whether the Pelican clan participate in the hunting orgies, though it clearly implies that the chase and feast are at least measurably ceremonial in character; and this implication was strengthened by the interest and comparative

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

224 While by far the larger share of Seri sustenance is drawn from the sea, a not inconsiderable portion is derived from the land; for the warriors and striplings and even the women are more skilful hunters than fishers.

The larger objects of the feral chase are deer of two or three species (the bura, or male-deer, being most conspicuous and easiest taken), antelope, and mountain sheep; to which the puma, the jaguar, and perhaps two or three other carnivores might be added. The conventional method of taking the bura and other deer is a combination of stalking and coursing, usually conducted by five of the younger warriors, though three or four may serve in emergency; any excess over five being regarded as superfluous, or as a confession of inferiority. The chase is conducted in a distinctly ceremonial and probably ritualistic fashion, even when the finding of the game is casual, or incidental to a journey: at sight of the quarry, the five huntsmen scatter stealthily in such manner as partially to surround it; when it takes fright one after the other strives to show himself above the shrubbery or dunes in order to break its line of flight into a series of zigzags; and whether successful in this effort or not they keep approximate pace with it until it tires, then gradually surround it, and finally rush in to either seize it in their hands or cripple it with clubs—though the latter procedure is deemed undignified, if not wrong, and hardly less disreputable than complete failure. When practicable the course is laid toward the rancheria or camp; and in any event the ideal finish is to bring the animal alive into the family group, where it may be dissected by the women, and where the weaklings may receive due share of the much-prized blood and entrails. The dissection is merely a ravenous
264 rending of skin and flesh, primarily with the teeth (perhaps after oblique bruising or tearing by blows with the hupf over strongly flexed joints), largely with hands and fingers aided anon by a foot planted on the carcass, and partly with some improvised device, such as a horn or tooth of the victim itself, the serrated edge of a shell-cup, or perhaps a sharp-edged cane-splint from a broken arrow carried for emergency's sake. Commonly the entire animal, save skin and harder bones, is gulped at a sitting in which the zeal of the devotee and the frenzy of the carnivore blend; but in case the group is small and the quarry large, the sitting is extended by naps or prolonged slumberings, and
[252] the more energetic squaws may even trouble to kindle a fire and partially cook the larger joints, thereby inciting pallid appetite to new efforts. Finally the leg bones are split for the marrow and their ends
[23] preserved for awls; the horns are retained by the successful huntsmen as talisman-trophies; while the skin is stretched in the desert sun,
[281] scratched and gnawed free of superfluous tissue, rubbed into partial
224 pliability, and kept for bedding or robe or kilt.
957 The chase of the hare is closely parallel to that of the deer save that it is conducted by striplings, who thereby serve apprenticeship in hunt-

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

ing and at the same time enrich the tribal larder with a game beneath the dignity of the warriors; while still smaller boys similarly chase the rabbit, which is commonly scorned by the striplings. The conventional hare-hunting party is three, and it is deemed disreputable to increase this number greatly. The youths spread at sight of the game and seek to surround it, taking ingenious and constant advantage of the habit of the hare to run obliquely or in zigzags to survey more readily the source of its fright; for some time they startle it but slightly by successive appearances at a distance, but gradually increase its harassement until it bounds hither and thither in terror, when they rapidly close in and seize it, the entire chase commonly lasting but a few minutes. The quarry is customarily taken alive to camp, where it is quickly rent to fragments and the entrails and flesh and most of the bones consumed; the skin usually passes into possession of a matron for use as infantile clothing or cradle bedding, while the ears are kept by the youth who first seized the game until his feat is eclipsed by some other event—unless chance hunger sooner tempts him to transmute his trophy into pottage.

While the collective, semiceremonial style of chase alone is thoroughly good form in Seri custom, it is often rendered impracticable by the scattering of the tribe in separate families or small bands, in which case the bura and its associates, like the larger carnivores customarily, are taken by strategy rather than by strength. This form of chase is largely individual; in it archery plays a leading rôle; and in it, too, ambuscade, stealthy lying in wait, and covert assault attain high development. It is closely analogous with the warfare typical of the tribe; and it is especially noteworthy as one of the most effective stimuli to intellectual activity, and hence to the development of invention—if the term may be applied to industrial products so lowly as those of the Seri.

The chief artifact produced by the strategic chase on land would seem to be the analogue of the harpoon used at sea, i. e., the arrow. This weapon is one of the three or four most highly differentiated and thoroughly perfected of the Seri artifacts, ranking with canteen-olla and balsa, and perhaps outranking the turtle-harpoon. It is fabricated with great care and high skill, and with striking uniformity in details of material and construction. A typical example is 25 inches in length and consists of three pieces—point, foreshaft, and main shaft (feathered toward the nock). The foreshaft is 8¼ inches long, of hard wood carefully ground by rubbing with quartzite or pumice into cylindrical form, about three-eighths of an inch in diameter at the larger end and tapering slightly toward the point; the larger end is extended by careful grinding into a tang which is fitted into the main shaft, the joint being neatly wrapped with sinew. This main shaft is a cane-stalk (*Phragmites communis*?) 15 or 16 inches long, carefully selected for size and well straightened and smoothed; it is feathered with three equidistantly-

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

291 [177] Of all the party at Costa Rica in 1894 subchief Mashém was the only one who wore Caucasian apparel with any air of comfort and fitness; yet even he, with hat and shirt, boots and breeches, and loose bandana about his neck in cowboy style (plate XVII), did not feel fully dressed without the slender hair-cord necklace of his kin in its wonted place. On the frontier improvised fig-leaves were sometimes put on the children of less than a dozen years (as illustrated by the standing infant shown in plate XIV, who was thus dressed hastily for her picture); and a common garb of the smaller children at Costa Rica, as they played about the rancheria or wandered in directions away from the white

[412] [854]

FIG. 25—Seri hairbrush.

FIG. 30—Seri cradle.

man's rancho, was limited to a cincture of hair cord or snake skin, or perhaps of agave fiber, under which an improvised kilt might be tucked on the Caucasian's approach.

281 513 In addition to the individual apparel, each clan, or at least the elder-woman or her fraternal executive, accumulates some surplus material as opportunity offers, and this serves as family bedding until occasion arises for converting it to other uses. Of late the prevailing materials are pelican skins, lightly dressed and joined into robes by sinew stitching; deerskins, dried or partially dressed; cormorant skins, treated like those of the pelican; seal skins, usually fragmentary; peccary skins,

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

281 apparently dried without dressing, together with
513 skins of rabbits, mountain sheep, antelope, etc, usually tattered or torn into fragments. Commonly the hides and pelts are nearly or quite in natural condition, retaining the hair, fur, or feathers. The dressing is apparently limited to scratching and gnawing away superfluous flesh, followed by some rubbing and greasing; tanning is apparently unknown. By far the most abundant of the collective possessions are the pelican-skin robes, which form
[439] the sole article of recognized barter with aliens. The aggregate stock accumulated at any time is but meager, never too much to be borne on the heads and backs of the clan in case of unexpected decamping.

412 Aside from the painting paraphernalia, there is
302 but a single conspicuous toilet article; this is a hair-brush made of yucca fiber bound into cylindrical form, as illustrated in figure 29. This article is in frequent use; both women and men give much attention to brushing their own long and luxurious locks and cultivating the hair and scalps of their children, the process being regarded as not only directly useful but in some measure sacramental. Ordinarily the hair is parted in the middle and brushed straight, the tresses being permitted to wander at will and never braided or bound or restrained by fillets save in imitation of Caucasian customs on the frontier; though in certain ceremonies the pelage is gathered in a lofty knot on the top-head.[1]

854 The Seri cradle is merely a bow of paloblanco or other switch with rude cross-sticks lashed on, as shown in figure 30. On this is laid a small pelican-skin robe, with a quantity of pelican down for a diaper, and perhaps a few pelican feathers attached as plumes to wave over the occupant's face; though on the frontier these primitive devices are largely replaced by rags.

283 Among the important appurtenances of Seri life are the cords used for belts and necklaces, as well as for the attachment of ceremonial headdresses, for converting the kilts into bags, and for numberless minor purposes. The finest of these are made from human hair; and for this purpose the combings are carefully kept, twisted into strands, and wound on thorns or sticks in slender bobbins, such as that illustrated

FIG. 31.—Hair spindle.

[1] Cf. Hardy, Travels, p. 250.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

114 342 middle. Two imperfect wind-breaks of brush, less than a quarter of a circumference in curvature, stood near the camp..

On the subject of textiles and textile clothing (pp. 171, 225-232), 114 McGee is necessarily vague on account of lack of specimens. He 281 says that native kilts, from waist to knee, were either of birdskin or "a rectangle of coarse textile fabric," "woven probably on some prim- 286 itive device"; that it is practically certain that a long-sleeved, short- 291 bodied shirt or wammus is "of local aboriginal design" and was "made primitively of haircloth or native textiles"; that the probable genetic series of Seri garments was: 1, the pelican-skin robe used as a kilt, 2, the textile shirt, 3, the textile kilt; and that Seri fabrics, according to a Mexican informant, "resemble coarse bagging, and are woven or netted quite plainly."[1]

Human hair cord could be netted, or twined in double weft into 114 basket-like bags or mats; it could hardly be woven into cloth without 171 a loom. The same holds of *ixtle*, agave fiber. Bast of willow, cotton- 286 wood, beanstalk, such as was spun and twined, and perhaps woven on a limited scale, by the Colorado river Yuman tribes, was not available to the Seri, though they may have had nearly equally soft substitutes, even in their desert. Cotton they did not have. *Ixtle* is a strong, harsh fiber, excellent for cordage, nets, open-mesh bags, and the like, and still largely used in Mexico for such purposes. It would also serve well for fringe-aprons, for which the Lower Californians used it. A fabric from it would be rough and stiff, giving little warmth, not very satisfactory for a kilt, and quite unserviceable for a fitted garment like a sleeved shirt. Cotton was the prevailing garment material found along the coast by the first Spaniards, north up to the Cahita (Ka'ita, namely Tehueco, Mayo, Yaqui); here *ixtle* became more prevalent though cotton persisted; but the type of garment is not clear.

As to looms, *ixtle* is today woven into carrying bags on a heddled belt-loom by the Nahua-speaking Indians of Sinaloa. The Mayo weave woolen girdles on a similar loom. They also weave woolen blankets on a demountable horizontal loom, the warp passing continuously around the two heavy yarn beams. It is not clear whether this is a hybrid Spanish or a purely native apparatus. The Opata and Pima Bajo loom is not known. The American Pima weave cotton both on a belt-loom and on a staked horizontal loom, but with warps in a single plane.[2] It is difficult to imagine these looms existing among the Seri, except the first mentioned; and this would not yield them much in the way of garments. There is no reason why they 114 should have worn more than the Lower Californian women's fringe- 291 aprons, supplemented perhaps by birdskin blankets and loin covers. 434 They no doubt secured occasional garments from neighboring tribes, as they gladly but irregularly wear those of whites today; and this

[1] Russell, BAE-R, 23:118-153, 1908.

482

FIG. 7. CARRYING WATER FROM A DESERT AGUAJE

281
342

FIG. 8. STRETCHING AND DRYING THE PELICAN SKIN BOBE

[p. 198(A)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1923-1940) 1945
MUZE Semi MUZE

[301]
[302]
[386]
[516]

FIG. 11. PAINTING THE FACE
USING A RED PIGMENT OBTAINED FROM THE PERCH.

223 lice-infested carcasses were then gathered
264 and brought to a central place among the stinking rocks where a gluttonous feast was held in the dark, the long ahungered tribesmen gorging themselves with the soft entrails and succulent parts, and carousing in the carnage until overcome by slumber.

281 The day following the slaughter, the
294 matrons collected the carcasses with least damaged plumage and carefully removed the skins, which were then gnawed and sucked clean of flesh and grease and dried in the sun (Fig. 5). From two or more of these skins they made a kilt or robe (Figs. 1, 2), the principal apparel, not so much for protection from cold as from the scratch and prick of the abounding spines and thorns of Seriland. The skins were sewed with sinew and often held in place on the body by a
283 cord made of human hair (Fig. 1). The
302 culture of their long, luxuriant hair, indeed, was an important matter. They brushed their hair regularly with a brush fashioned

[p. 200(A)]

123 223 [262] birds. As soon as the skin was off the breast was laid on top of the coals and roasted. The meat was red as raw beef, but it was free of fishy flavor and tasted excellent. The Indians ate pelican flesh till daylight.

252 [123] We gave them a generous helping of flour in a pail and this with water from a canteen, Santo stirred vigorously with a stick and then kneaded the dough with his hands until it was of the right consistency. He rolled hunks of this into little balls of dough about the size of golf balls, which he laid on his blanket. The boys picked these up, patted them flat like pancakes, scraped away ashes and sand from the edge of the fire, placed their pancakes in the hollow, covered them with hot ashes and hot sand, and in about three minutes pulled them out all baked brown. They shook the ashes and sand from them, leaving them clean and ready to eat. I am telling this in detail to show how simple cooking can be done without a dutch-oven, frying pan, or cooking grease, far from civilization.

281 [123] We were soon paddled across to their village on the shores of Kino Bay and the skins turned over to Mrs. Santo. The skins had been split down the back, leaving the breast unmarred. The wings and legs had already been removed, and she sewed the skins together with sinew recovered from the birds. The boys had secured an extra pelican making six, three to a side, then placed together and sewed lengthwise, making a robe three and a half feet wide by seven feet long.

[342] [291] [301]

Pegging out and drying a Pelican skin robe by a Seri Indian woman - 1936

281 The Indians made a mound of sand full length of the robe and amply wide rounding off the top. On this the robe was spread, flesh side up, and pinned to the mound by slender slivers of *carrizo* and left exposed to the sun. The skins were singularly free from oil or fat and in a few hours, the robe was cured. The pins removed, the sand shaken from the plumage, and it was ready to use as a blanket covering at night or in old times, as clothing wrapped around the body.

The robes of silvery gray are from male Pelicans and are larger and more attractive than robes from the female birds, which have white breasts, edged with gray.

281 177 Before the garments and costumes of civilization encroached on the Seris, Pelican robes and deer skins were the only clothing worn by the natives, but now they have adopted civilized ways to a great extent, Pelican robes as clothing became obsolete.